In the Stream of Life

New entrant to live-streaming discovers it means much more than commerce

By Sudesha Sarkar

When I got a job in China, my first thought was of the things I would love to do there: visit Tibet, Autonomous Region, climb the Great Wall, ride the magic Sky Train which hurtles through air suspended from the rails and three of whose carriage sides are of glass. But never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would become an online “star” selling things live.

Yet that is what I found myself doing in September, three months before the dead line for eradication of absolute poverty in China. To give you an idea of the size of China’s e-commerce market, it’s been the largest in the world for seven consecutive years, according to a report by China Internet Network Information Center in September. In the first half of this year, this market notched up a staggering 5.13 trillion yuan ($736.3 billion) in online sales. Buying and selling things online has become a way of life, from cities to remote villages.

This has been made possible due to the drive to build infrastructure, from roads in villages to telecom towers; innovation in technology, including digital payments; and the flourishing of online retail platforms like JD.com and Taobao.

Early this year, JD.com’s live-streaming arm launched its poverty alleviation platform, the Jingyuan Farmers’ Channel, to help rural residents sell their goods online. It had held around 100,000 live-streaming promotions for farmers, when Li approached JD.com with the live-streaming proposal, they agreed since they were keen on creating a greater buzz about local products.

Fuping is a major mushroom base. Due to the epidemic, 1,800 tons of mushroom, mostly button mushroom, could not reach the market, hitting the farmers. When button mushrooms are ready for harvest, they have to be picked immediately or will become flat, and their price will go down. So farmers check them throughout the night and this backbreaking labor was lost during the epidemic.

The grower we visited during the live-streaming told us he was selling his crops at almost half the price. But he was still on the job, uncomplaining and stoic, tending to his plants as he talked to us. For me, that was the image of the Chinese farmers who bear the burden of poverty alleviation programs to help rural residents sell their goods online. It had held around 100,000 live-streaming promotions for farmers in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, north China, where she said local products like beef jerky, noodles and yogurt.

“It was very nervous and worried that I wouldn’t be able to help the local goods sell well,” she confessed. “I felt I had a heavy responsibility and didn’t sleep all night, staying up to memorize the script. I also tried out each product to get a better understanding of it.”

New profession

The importance of live-streaming and the buzz about local products.

By Zhang Wei

“A man who sold mushrooms was a targeted poverty alleviation campaign for farmers in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, north China, where she said local products like beef jerky, noodles and yogurt.

I am happy to say that over 510,000 people watched the live-streaming, and though we sold goods worth only a bit over 3,000 yuan ($756), JD.com’s Zhang Kejun told us that she received calls from officials from different areas, wanting to do a similar thing.

“China’s road to prosperity was not built in a day,” Li told us. “It was built brick by brick, and this was our brick.”

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E-commerce’s host Kunbic Noor (right) and Beijing Review’s Sudesha Sarkar live-stream to promote agricultural products in Fuping County, Hebei Province in north China, on September 15.